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1-36 Infantry scout ‘earning his spurs’ in northern Iraq

By Master Sgt. Duff E. McFadden, 2nd HBCT Public Affairs

“Spartan” 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE MAREZ, Iraq – In today’s Army, the cavalry scout is considered the commander's eyes and ears on the battlefield. Scouts engage the enemy with anti-armor weapons on their scout vehicles in the field, track and report enemy movement and activities, and direct the employment of various joint weapon systems against an adversary.

With its heavy, physical demands and specialized skills, serving as a cavalry scout is not an easy task – especially if you add in the fact you’re a 34-year old Soldier re-joining the military after an extensive break in service.

Specialist Aaron Suchan, a scout platoon gunner with the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division and a Brillion, Wis. native, is “earning his spurs” in Mosul, Iraq, as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The 1-36 Inf. Reg. from Fort Riley, Kan., is attached to 2HBCT in Ninewa province.

A 1994 graduate of Greenville (Wis.) High School, Spc. Suchan attended basic training between his junior and senior years. After graduation, he was stationed at Fort

Leonard Wood, Mo., where he served as a wheeled vehicle mechanic. In 1995, he was given a medical discharge for flat feet.

“When I was in the military the first time, I was actually pretty young,” Spc. Suchan said. “I thought I was a hot shot, but boy, did I get a wake-up call. It was hard to come to the realization, ‘You’re not that great.’

“Being in the military was just something I always wanted to do. I’ve always looked up to Soldiers while I was growing up. I liked what they represented. When you watch the ads on TV, you see Soldiers repelling out of a helicopter. I thought, ‘That’s the unit I want to get into,’”

Despite a 12-year break from the military, the then-31 year-old decided he wanted to give the Army another shot. He was working at a Wisconsin steel mill and took nearly a \$40,000 pay cut to re-join the service.

“My recruiter said I could get a waiver to come back in,” Spc. Suchan said. “I wanted to finish what I started, so I figured I’d try again and see if I could do it. It was pretty much what I remembered. I have to admit I was a little nervous, just hoping I wouldn’t break again, physically.”

Needless to say, Spc. Suchan has noticed a few differences between the Army of the mid-90’s and today’s force.

“Today’s Army is definitely more prepared,” he noted. “We have a great class of people, plus plenty of funding and training. I was 31 years old when I joined the Army the second time. The first thing I noticed: it seems a little harder to recover and recuperate following a hard day of (physical training), or work. I also seem to get winded a little easier than I used to.”

Becoming a cavalry scout, he said, was an easy decision.

“I wanted to be on the front lines, to be hands-on and to be involved in everything going on,” he said. “The Scouts have a very long tradition, history and heritage. It’s very important to me to have (a military occupation) which stands for something.”

At 34 years of age, Spc. Suchan is the oldest Scout in his platoon, but that doesn’t faze him in the least.

“You’re never too old to do anything,” he said. “The cavalry scout job was meant for an 18 to 25 year-old Soldier, and yet, I’m keeping up with them. What probably drives me the most is the fact I don’t want to be passed up by the younger guys in the platoon.”

He’s also completed Air Assault School, finishing in the top half of his class, as well as being trained in Army combatives.

Married and the father of two children, Spc. Suchan is already thinking about his future Army career. After re-enlisting for five years in December, he has high hopes of being promoted.

“Everything I do now is for me,” he said. “I joined the Army for me, and I’m staying in for me. The Army is the only thing that hasn’t turned its back on me.

“I like it here. Everything is the way it is for a reason. Every day, I’m happy to be here. I talk to people back home about how proud I am of what I do. I definitely take pride in my job; I know I’m making a difference here.”



Specialist Aaron Suchan helps pull security after tactically deploying from a simulated helicopter, with fellow Cavalry Scouts. His scout platoon, 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, recently assisted in teaching Iraqi Army Soldiers on Air Mobile tasks at Joint Security Station India in Al Kindi, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Jason Agiletti)



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